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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 005956

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PA-HAMAS CONFRONTATION IN GAZA

Classified By: DCM Gene A. Cretz. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: Clashes took place in Gaza City on October 2 between Palestinian Authority (PA) policemen and Hamas gunmen. Three Palestinians were killed -- a senior police officer and two civilians -- while at least 51 were wounded, many of whom were bystanders. Two police stations in Gaza City were badly damaged. Palestinian police protested at an October 3 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), firing volleys in the air from within the PLC compound in Gaza. Separately, elements of Faruq Qaddumi's "Popular Army" shot and killed a taxi driver in Khan Yunis. End Summary.

12. (C) A reliable Ministry of Interior (MOI) contact told poloff that the PA had instituted checkpoints on many roads in the Gaza Strip on October 2. At one such checkpoint, PA police had asked for identity cards from the armed passengers of one vehicle. The occupants, the contact reported, refused to provide identification and called Hamas militants to the scene -- near the Shaykh Radwan area of north Gaza City. The encounter reportedly escalated into gunfire between Hamas members and the PA police. UNRWA reported that one Hamas member was shot in the leg and a police car ran over and killed a girl, one of two civilian casualties. (UNRWA said there was a conflicting report that a PA officer jumped a queue at an ATM machine where a Hamas member was waiting, sparking confrontation.) In any event, the confrontation escalated. Hamas elements fired three rocket-propelled grenades at the PA police station at the Shati Refugee camp along the seashore near Shaykh Radwan, killing the Palestinian police officer in charge of the station and another civilian. The Shaykh Radwan police station was torched during the confrontation, according to UNRWA.

13. (C) The Follow Up Committee of the National and Islamic Factions met late on October 2 in Gaza to contain the crisis, according to press reports and the MOI contact. He said the crisis ended at 0130 on October 3 when "Hamas decided to retreat," and summarized the impact of the day's events as "an opportunity for the PA to step forward to control the street." The PA police arrested eight Hamas members, but the contact predicted they would be released October 4.

14. (C) On October 3, UNRWA reported gunfire during the funeral of the PA policeman, which resulted in two injuries. UNRWA indicated that shots were fired by members of the funeral procession and returned by Hamas, but an NGO contact reported that his colleagues had informed him that Hamas had initiated the gunfire. Separately, PA police entered the compound and building of the Palestinian Legislative Council in protest over the absence of PA assistance to the policemen during their clash with Hamas, according to UNRWA. Firing in the air outside the building disrupted the session, but caused no injuries.

15. (C) In Khan Yunis, an unrelated confrontation between forces of Faruq Qaddumi's "Popular Army" and taxi drivers blocking a road in an apparent protest of fuel price hikes resulted in the shooting of two drivers, one of whom died as a result.

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JONES